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ABSTRACT

This document chronicles the study of an intensive writing instruction workshop held in a diverse, low income neighborhood in Chicago. The study focused particularly on how individual teacher knowledge and beliefs, school contexts, and the structure and content of the workshop interacted both to support and to inhibit teacher learning. The workshop began strongly but ended with dissatisfaction. Participants expressed frustration with the workshop content; workshop leaders were frustrated by the participants and the context. By the end of the workshop, 4 out of the 23 volunteer participants had dropped out, and 12 of the remaining 19 gave the workshop fair to poor evaluations. The context, the workshop, and teacher perceptions all seemed to interact in ways that inhibited change in writing instruction. The overcrowding, the diverse student population, and multiple curriculum requirements contributed to teachers' perceptions of many constraints to implementing an individualized, time-consuming approach to writing instruction in the classrooms. Because the leaders perceived so many constraints in the context and had such low expectations for teachers, they did little to support the teachers in breaking through their negative perceptions and reinforced the teachers' perceptions about the difficult y of implementing new approaches to writing. Missing from the workshop were important links to classroom practice, to school policies supporting change, to innovation efforts and school context, and to actual classroom practice and school policies and procedures. The study suggests a number of ways in which instructional change designers, workshop leaders, school leaders, and teachers can work together to create the kinds of links needed to support teachers' learning and change. These include integrating change efforts into school contexts, and assisting workshop leaders to evaluate and reflect on their own practice. Suggestions are also made for workshop leaders, school leaders, and teachers to identify and remove constraints to effective practice. (Contains 17 references.) (ND)

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Missing Links: The Complexities of Supporting Teacher Learning in School Contexts

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Missing Links: The Complexities of Supporting Teacher Learning in School Contexts

The study was designed, the site carefully chosen. As I embarked on this study of an intensive writing instruction workshop in an urban elementary school, I was confident that this site would provide a rich source of information about how individual teacher knowledge and beliefs, school contexts and the structure and content of teacher workshops interact to support and inhibit teacher learning. While I had read numerous studies examining these three pieces of teacher learning separately, there seemed to be a dearth of studies which looked at the interaction between teacher perceptions, the contexts in which teachers work, and the opportunities they have to learn new ways of thinking about and implementing instruction. My goal was to begin to bridge that gap by conducting a descriptive study of teacher learning in one school setting which addressed all three of these areas.

The workshop I chose to study had many of the qualities associated with successful teacher learning opportunities. The workshop was associated with a national organization that has been committed to promoting changes in teacher practice in the area of writing instruction for many years. On paper, the workshop was carefully structured with a strong emphasis on teacher participation and application of research to practice. This workshop was led by experienced teachers from the same school district who had led the workshop in similar settings with reportedly positive results. It took place at the school site during the school year, allowing immediate implementation of new instructional techniques and the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues.

There were a number of contextual features at this particular school which indicated that it was a supportive environment for teacher learning as

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well. Teachers in the school requested the workshop and convinced the school management team to fund it. Although the workshop required a significant time commitment outside of school hours, over half of the teaching staff volunteered to attend. All teachers in the school were involved in instructional decision-making. The principal initiated many learning opportunities for teachers and encouraged them to participate. All of these features seemed to indicate that this was a rich setting for examining teacher learning and change.

Given this promising context, the events that followed were both surprising and enlightening. The workshop began on a strong note but ended with dissatisfaction expressed on all sides. Workshop participants expressed frustration with the workshop content, the workshop leaders expressed frustration with the participants and the context and the principal expressed frustration with the whole situation. By the end of the workshop, four out of 23 participants dropped out and 12 of the 19 remaining participants gave the workshop fair to poor evaluations. A comparison of pre and post observations, interviews and surveys indicated that there was little change in perceptions and practice relating to writing instruction among the participants. No follow-up to the workshop was planned. As the principal said, "I believe we will be moving on to other areas next year."

Why did a teacher learning opportunity that had so much promise have such disappointing results? A review of current thought on teacher learning and an analysis of the data collected in this study suggest a number of answers to that important question.

Current Perspectives

Teacher learning is a complex process involving individual teacher perceptions, the context of the schools in which they teach, and the structure and content of the learning opportunities in which they participate. In the last two decades, a large body of literature has emerged focusing on these three

aspects of teacher learning. The literature on teacher cognition suggests that teacher knowledge is a complex combination of pedagogical content knowledge, practical knowledge, values, and priorities that are shaped by teachers' experiences within school contexts and in turn shape their teaching practice. Barnes (1992) suggests the following set of interpretive "frames" or perceptions that seem to have a particularly strong influence on teachers' practice:

- Preconceptions, often implicit, about the nature of what they are teaching.
- Preconceptions about learning and how it takes place.
- Preconceptions about students that limit what is thought to be useful or possible.
- Beliefs about priorities and constraints inherent in the professional and institutional context. (p. 19)

One area of teacher cognition that appears frequently in teacher belief literature, however, has not been articulated clearly in Barnes' model. A number of researchers have suggested that "efficacy" beliefs have a particularly powerful influence on teacher behavior and teacher change (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Rose & Medway, 1981; Smylie, 1990). Basing their work on Albert Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy, these theorists focus on teachers' perceptions of their own ability to influence student learning or what they call "personal teaching efficacy" and the influence of these perceptions on classroom practice. Studies conducted in this area have linked efficacy to teachers' choice of classroom management and instructional strategies, effort and perseverance in accomplishing difficult tasks, and

willingness to implement school and district innovations (Smylie, 1990). Thus, powerful beliefs that affect teachers' practice include perceptions about content, learning, students, priorities and constraints in the context and personal certainty in one's own practice.

The difficulty of transforming teachers' beliefs or perceptions has been widely documented in the literature on teacher learning (Anderson & Smith, 1987; Kennedy, 1991; Pajares, 1990). Kennedy (1991) suggests that beliefs about teaching are particularly resilient because:

> teachers have already logged over 3000 days as classroom participant observers and thus have not only developed strongly entrenched beliefs about teaching and learning, but have also developed a strongly entrenched belief that they already know what teaching is all about and that they have little to learn. (p. 9)

Another reason for the resiliency of current perceptions cited by Kennedy and supported by others (e.g. Duffy & Roehler, 1986; Pajares, 1990) is that people are more likely to distort or ignore conflicting information than they are to question their own beliefs. Changing the underlying assumptions that shape teachers' practice presents an immense challenge.

Kennedy suggests that significant conceptual change will only occur when teachers are assisted in making explicit the underlying assumptions that shape their practice and questioning those experiences in the light of contradictory evidence. She states that one way to provoke change is to provide "vivid portraits of alternative models of teaching" that are plausible,

concrete and detailed and also to include a stimulus that focuses the teachers' attention on the difference between the models and their current models of teaching. Menges (1990) and Baird (1992) suggest that reflecting on teaching experiences with feedback from others is a particularly powerful tool for assisting in making beliefs explicit and seeing the differences between alternative models and current beliefs.

While challenging teachers to examine the difference between their models and alternative models of teaching is an essential component of teacher learning, it is not necessarily enough to support changes in classroom practice. The connection between teachers' beliefs about effective practice and their actual classroom practice can be quite tenuous (Duffy & Roehler, 1986; Guskey, 1986). Teachers' practice is strongly affected by their perceptions of constraints and priorities in their teaching context. Perceptions about the limitations imposed on their teaching by class size and composition, curriculum mandates and assessment demands, and the expectations and priorities of colleagues, administrators and parents can contribute to disparities between beliefs and actions (Barnes, 1992; Duffy & Roehler, 1986). Unless teachers are assisted in applying new models in real teaching contexts and find them to be effective and manageable, the new models may be rejected as inappropriate for the teacher's particular context.

These ideas about teacher learning connect closely with the literature

on staff development. Teacher learning opportunities that include the demonstration of teaching strategies in a similar school context, assistance in planning for implementation in the teachers' context, reflection on implementation (both individually and with others), and assistance in working through the difficulties inherent in adopting new models of teaching are needed to support long-term change in practice (Joyce & Showers, 1988; Richardson, 1990; Schon, 1983; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990). Activities that involve the participants in examining the underlying assumptions of their current teaching practices, comparing these practices to alternative ones and testing the alternative practices in real teaching contexts have all been shown to be essential components of effective teacher learning opportunities.

The context in which a teacher works can also have a strong impact on teacher perceptions and learning. Classroom characteristics such as class size, academic heterogeneity, and the concentration of low-achieving students in the class can have a strong influence on teachers' perceptions about constraints or priorities in their particular setting (Smylie, 1988). Building structures and policies, district, state and national policies, and community characteristics all have some impact on the development of school cultures that support or inhibit teacher learning as well.

A number of common themes regarding building level factors that

support and inhibit teacher learning and change have emerged from the literature on school cultures and innovation implementation. One contextual feature that strongly influences the implementation of innovation is the interpersonal relationships among the teachers in a particular school. As Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1990) say, "Change involves learning to do something new, and interaction is the primary basis for social learning...Therefore the quality of working relationships among teachers in strongly related to implementation of new strategies and concepts" (p. 77). Collaboration with peers has been linked to increased certainty in practice and willingness to try new strategies in the classroom (Rosenholtz, 1989; Smylie, 1988). Collaborative reflection with teaching peers has also been shown to be a powerful tool in supporting the examination of underlying assumptions and current practice (Baird, 1992). Although the organizational structures of many schools do not support collegial interaction and collaboration, there appears to be a growing awareness of the benefits of having teachers learn together (Rosenholtz, 1989; Warren Little, 1990). Warren Little and others have discovered that the amount and kind of teacher collaboration about instruction that occurs in a particular teaching context can have a strong effect on teacher learning.

Teacher involvement in decision-making about instructional issues has been suggested as another important influence on teacher learning and

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change. (Berry & Ginsburg, 1990; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Smylie, 1988). Involving teachers in making decisions that affect instructional policy can lessen their perceptions of external constraints on their practice and can also provide an opportunity for them to examine their current assumptions and practices (Smylie, 1988).

Organizational structures that encourage experimentation and support and reward innovation have also been shown to support teacher learning (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1989; Smylie, 1988). Teachers are much more likely to take the risks needed to try new strategies and implement new models of instruction in settings in which innovation is acknowledged and rewarded.

As mentioned in the introduction, the school setting and workshop structure examined in this case study seemed to embody many of the features which have been connected with effective teacher learning efforts. Because the teachers initiated the workshop and attended voluntarily, there was some evidence that their perceptions about this approach were positive. Further examination of the school context and workshop content and structure as well as careful examination of the participants' perceptions was needed to help determine why events happened as they did.

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Data sources and analysis

The setting

Two main criteria guided my selection of a site for this particular study. Because of the intense need for reform in low-income, inner city schools in particular, I wanted to find a school in a diverse, urban setting that was dealing with many of the challenges facing inner city educators today. In addition, I needed to find a site that was going to be involved in an intensive teacher development initiative that had the potential for supporting changes in teachers' perceptions and practice. A ten week writing workshop affiliated with a nationally known writing project being held in a school in a diverse, low-income neighborhood in Chicago appeared to meet both of these criteria particularly well.

At the time of this study, "North" School served 1,050 students in pre-school through Grade 8. The student population included a wide variety of ethnic groups including 60% Hispanic, 12% Asian, 12% Caucasian, 15% African American, and 1% Native American students. 48% of the students attending North were classified as limited English proficient. 92% of the North students came from low income families.

In 1992-93, North School had a faculty of one principal and 58.5 teachers (.5 refers to a half-time position). Thirty three of these teachers were assigned to classrooms in Grades Pre-kindergarten through eight. Of these 33

classrooms, 14 were identified as bilingual classrooms. The remaining 25.5 staff positions included various support personnel. Although the average class size listed in the School Report Card ranged from 26 in Kindergarten to 37 in Grade 6, there appeared to be many additional staff available to work with students in special support programs. Because of a lack of space in the building, the principal stated that she was unable to reduce class size and therefore relied heavily on support personnel to assist teachers in meeting the students' needs.

As an offshoot of school reform in Chicago, each school now has a site based decision-making body called the Local School Council which is made up of parents, community members, and two teachers. In addition, teachers are given an advisory role on matters pertaining to the educational program through a Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC). The ultimate responsibility for approving the budget and school improvement plan lies with the Local School Council. The principal and faculty at North had decided to divide the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee into separate subject area committees including reading, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, and bilingual education. All certified staff members were assigned to a subject area committee. Each committee was responsible for determining goals and objectives and implementing these recommendations in their subject area. They were responsible for surveying

and choosing new textbooks, ordering materials, and designing and implementing monthly activities and incentive programs that involved the whole school in activities related to their curriculum area. In addition, they were responsible for evaluating the progress made on their goals and reporting to the Local School Council in the spring. The language arts committee had requested this particular workshop and had convinced the Local School Council to allocate funds to support it.

It is evident from this information that North was dealing with many of the challenges facing urban educators across the nation, including meeting the needs of a very ethnically diverse and low socioeconomic population in a less than optimal physical environment. It appeared from the large number of support personnel on the staff that there were some resources available beyond the classroom for meeting those needs. Teachers were actively involved in curriculum design and implementation. There also appeared to be a number of teachers who were committed to learning more about writing instruction. Thus, this site appeared to be very suitable for the study I planned to conduct.

Data collection and analysis

Because this study included an examination of teacher knowledge and beliefs, the content and structure of the workshop, and the school context, I used multiple data collection methods. In order to gain insights into the

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workshop participants' perceptions and practices relating to writing instruction at the beginning and end of the workshop, I administered a pre and post survey to all the participants in the workshop and conducted individual interviews and classroom observations with six of the participants before the workshop began, halfway through the workshop, and after it concluded. In order to gather information about the context, I interviewed the principal, the two teachers who served on the local school council and a parent member of the Local School Council. I also included questions about the context in my interviews with teacher participants. In addition, I observed meetings in which instructional policies relating to reading and writing were made (e.g. curriculum committee meetings, Local School Council meetings). I also collected documents from the school and the district which related to instructional guidelines and decision-making. I gathered information about the content and structure of the workshop by attending all the workshop sessions (I took extensive field notes and audiotaped all the sessions), interviewing the workshop leaders, and collecting documents written by the leaders and the designers of this particular writing instruction workshop.

Based on the literature described earlier and multiple readings of the data, I developed categories for data analysis in the areas of teacher perceptions and practice relating to writing instruction, the content and structure of the workshop, and the context. Data about teacher perceptions

and practice at the beginning and end of the workshop were examined to determine what changes in perceptions and practice occurred over the course of the workshop. Descriptive data from the workshop gave insight into the content and structure of the workshop. Interviews with the participants and workshop leaders and pre and post surveys were examined to determine participant perceptions about the success of the workshop and their explanations for why the workshop progressed as it did. All of the data was examined to determine which contextual features affected the perceptions and practices of the workshop leaders and the participants.

The results

While the workshop started on note of enthusiasm and hope, it ended with disappointment on the part of the leaders and many of the participants.

Table 1

District Inservice Evaluation Form: Scaled Responses

	Very little			Very much
	1	2	3	4
1. How adequately did this session meet your needs?	1	10	1	4
2. How much of this session was appropriate for you?	3	9	2	2

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3. How much of the content of this session do you think you will be able to apply immediately or in the near future?	4	8	3	1
4. How many new and worthwhile ideas, techniques and skills did you acquire?	2	9	1	4
5. How well prepared was this session?	2	4	4	6
6. How was the rapport between you and the leaders of this session?	0	6	2	8
7. To what degree did the session motivate you to implement what was presented?	2	8	2	4

Note. n=16. (18 participants were present at this session. 16 returned these surveys.)

As Table 1 indicates, the majority of the participants filling out the survey chose the lower two categories on the scale when answering the questions focusing on the relevance and usefulness of the workshop content. The only two questions to which the majority of participants responded positively related to leader rapport and preparation. Individual interviews after the workshop confirmed these results. Eleven of the fifteen participants I interviewed after the workshop expressed concerns about the content of the workshop and the feasibility of implementing this approach to writing

instruction in their classrooms. The workshop leaders stated that they expected to see very little change in writing instruction practice in this school. The principal shared that the workshop did not live up to people's expectations and that the teachers had expressed frustrations to her about it. While a small number of participants expressed very positive feelings about the workshop, it was obvious that the majority were not satisfied with their experience.

It was not surprising that my post-observations, interviews, and surveys indicated little change in beliefs and practice relating to writing instruction among the participants. The main change observed in writing instruction practice was an increase in the time spent on journal writing among a small group of primary grade teachers. A few of the participants mentioned using particular prewriting strategies modeled in the workshop as well. None of the teachers that I observed altered their writing instruction practice radically. The results of the pre and post survey focusing on teacher perceptions indicated an increase in teachers' certainty in their writing instruction practice but little change in their views about content, students, and perceived constraints to implementing this approach to writing instruction in their classrooms. The post-interviews provided additional reinforcement for these conclusions.

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Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine how school contexts, teacher learning opportunities and teachers' perceptions interact to support or inhibit teacher learning. Further examination of the data in this setting indicated that the contextual features, the content and the structure of the workshop, and the participants' knowledge and beliefs all interacted in ways that inhibited change in writing instruction practice at North Elementary. Perceptions about priorities and constraints in this school context on the part of the workshop leaders and the participants had a particularly strong effect on the workshop. These perceptions were influenced by contextual features and in turn shaped the content and structure of the workshop.

Interaction Between School Context and Teacher Perceptions

The interaction between the context and the participants' perceptions about perceived constraints and priorities seemed most influential in this study. Very few of the participants made negative comments relating to the assumptions about content and learning underlying the approach to writing instruction advocated in the workshop. The primary barriers to implementation shared by the participants focused on personal uncertainty about their ability to implement the strategies and on contextual features that they believed would prevent them from implementing the strategies in their classrooms. Personal uncertainty seemed related primarily to the workshop

content and structure; perceived constraints and priorities, on the other hand, were directly related to contextual features in this school setting.

As mentioned earlier, there are a number of features in the school context that are associated with classroom practice and thus are closely connected to teacher perceptions. Both classroom features and building features influence teachers' perceptions about what is feasible and manageable in their particular teaching situations. Further analysis of the information gathered in this study indicated that these both classroom and building level features had a strong influence on teacher perceptions of constraints to implementing this particular approach to writing instruction at North.

Classroom Features

Previous studies have suggested that classroom features such as size, the heterogeneity of the students and the presence of large numbers of low-achieving or special need students can strongly affect teachers' perceptions about what can be accomplished with their classes. The results of my study reinforced this finding. On the final survey, 11 of 17 participants referred to class size as a constraint to implementing this approach in their classroom. Four of the six case-study teachers raised this concern in their final interviews as well. Data collected about the school indicated that class sizes were in fact quite large. Because the approach advocated by these leaders

focused on student choice and individualized feedback from teacher to student, it was not surprising that class size was perceived as a particularly powerful constraint. Thus, the fact that this school was struggling with overcrowding and large classes appeared to strengthen the teachers' perceptions that this approach to writing instruction was not manageable in this context and inhibited the success of the workshop.

The fact that the school had a very diverse population with a large number of non-English speaking students seemed to have a strong impact on some of the participants' perceptions about what they could accomplish with their students as well. Concerns about using the process approach to writing with bilingual students and students with a limited language background were expressed throughout the workshop. These concerns seemed related both to time issues and to concerns about the students' ability to assume the kind of individual responsibility which was advocated by the workshop leaders. Although the leaders claimed that the process approach to writing instruction worked with all students, the participants had no evidence from their own experience that this claim was true. The fact that their classes included students with such a wide range of abilities and language backgrounds was perceived by many of the participants to be a barrier to implementing this approach to writing and may have inhibited the workshops' success as well.

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Building Features

Again, an analysis of the data gathered in this study indicated that a number of building level features at North had a strong impact on teachers' perceptions relating to writing instruction. While on the surface, many of these features appeared to be supportive of teacher learning and change, in reality, they further inhibited the success of this workshop.

Participation in instructional decision-making. While all the teachers at North were involved in instructional decision-making through their participation on the curriculum committees, the effects of participation in this process on perceptions about writing instruction seemed very limited. The connection between writing instruction practice and guidelines established by the language arts committee was non-existent in classrooms in which observations were conducted. Very few of the teachers used the textbook chosen by the committee. None of the teachers appeared to view these guidelines or textbooks as a constraint on their practice nor did the guidelines appear to shape their views of content and learning. Even the participants on the language arts committee seemed to see very little connection between the guidelines they designed as part of the School Improvement Planning process and their daily classroom practice.

Besides writing guidelines for instructional practice, the subject area committees were responsible for organizing school-wide events that focused

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on their particular area. (e.g. spelling bee, science fair, reading contests.) Because the committees worked separately, these events were not coordinated and often overlapped. There seemed to be little coordination of these events with the curriculum, and many of the teachers perceived them as "one more thing to do." Thus, rather than relieving their perceptions about constraints to this instructional approach and giving them opportunities to examine their practice, the instructional decision-making procedures at North reinforced the teachers' perceptions of curriculum overload and fragmentation.

Opportunities for collaboration. The teachers' only scheduled opportunity for collaboration involved participation on the curriculum committees in which there was little discussion of classroom practice. All of the teachers who were interviewed stated that they had little opportunity for collaboration and wished they had more opportunities for sharing with their colleagues. Thus, while some of the teachers were engaged in the kinds of writing instruction practices advocated by the workshop leaders, they had little opportunity to support other teachers in attempting these approaches.

Support for innovation. While many of the teachers reported at the beginning of the workshop that they had the freedom to try new materials and approaches to instruction, the same teachers also reported that an overcrowded curriculum made it difficult to "fit writing in." In addition to

pressures to cover the material tested on the Illinois Goals Assessment Program and Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, three teachers mentioned that the numerous special activities planned by the curriculum committees contributed to the overcrowding of their curriculum. The principal encouraged the teachers to participate in these contests and classes and individual students were honored for their participation at an annual awards ceremony, making them a perceived priority among many of the teachers. Thus, a process designed to support innovation was actually contributing to perceptions of curriculum overload which in turn affected writing instruction practice.

Opportunities for teacher learning. At first glance it appears that the teachers' many opportunities to take workshops at the school and classes outside of the school would support conceptual change and changes in practice. However, because these opportunities were offered by different universities and agencies, they were not closely coordinated, nor was there an overall plan to ensure that all teachers were gaining certain skills or shared knowledge. Many of the teachers were taking multiple workshops in the school and/or additional classes at universities in the area. All of these workshops were presented as priorities and all required changes in classroom practice. Thus, because the opportunities for teacher learning were not carefully coordinated or sequenced, they seemed to be contributing to some of

the teachers' perceptions relating to an overcrowded curriculum and the difficulty of including more writing instruction in their daily teaching routine.

Summary

The primary influence that school contextual features had on teacher perceptions relating to writing instruction seemed to be on the teachers' perceptions of constraints and priorities at North. Size and composition of the class were perceived by many of the participants as barriers to implementing new approaches to writing instruction. School policies relating to innovation, instructional guideline development, and teacher learning opportunities all contributed to perceptions of curriculum overload among many of the participants. School policies relating to resource allocation and structures that separated reading and writing instruction all seemed to contribute to the perception that reading was a stronger priority than writing. Because writing was perceived to be a lower priority by many of the participants and because many of the teachers already felt it was difficult to fit everything into their busy day, it was difficult for them to see the feasibility or desirability of implementing a time-consuming approach to writing instruction such as the process approach advocated in the workshop.

While this particular school context seemed to support the development of perceptions about constraints and priorities that make it

difficult to implement new approaches to writing instruction, these perceptions were not shared by all participants in the workshop. While some participants seemed to have developed powerful perceptions of constraints in relation to writing instruction practice, a small group of teachers viewed this approach to writing instruction as both desirable and feasible in their classrooms at North. This supportive group of teachers suggested that the contextual constraints described above were not insurmountable obstacles to successfully implementing a process approach to writing instruction at North. These teachers were also a potential source of credible examples of implementation that the leaders might have used to begin to break through the perceived constraints to implementation held by many of the other participants. Thus, while the interaction between the context and teacher perceptions seemed to inhibit change in practice on the part of some of the participants, this was not the case with all of the teachers who were involved in the workshop.

The Interaction Between the Workshop and Teacher Perceptions

Teachers enter every learning opportunity with preconceived notions about the content of the subject being discussed, about how learning occurs in this particular content area, and about the constraints and priorities in their school context that might impact the implementation of the particular approach being discussed. Understanding what perceptions a particular group

of teachers might have, making these perceptions explicit, and supporting the teachers in seeing alternatives are essential components of any successful teaching effort. Unfortunately, the content and structure of the writing workshop at North did little to accomplish these essential steps.

Although the workshop leaders accurately identified many of the perceptions about content and constraints and priorities that were inhibiting implementation of new writing strategies, they did little to assist the teachers in dealing with these perceptions. They constantly emphasized "just trying one new thing" and made no demands on the teachers outside of workshop attendance. Rather than requiring that the teachers try specific activities in their classrooms and collaboratively reflect on the results, they stated in the first session that nothing would be required of the teachers outside of participation in the class. Without the expectation that all participants be trying new things, the few participants who did try new things soon became unwilling to share. It was obvious from our interview and their behavior that the leaders' expectations for the teachers in this workshop were extremely low. They gave the teachers the message that making radical changes in their writing instruction practice was virtually impossible and that being comfortable with their teaching was very important. These messages actually reinforced the teachers' perceptions about the difficulty of implementing new approaches to writing rather than challenging them.

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When the workshop leaders attempted to deal directly with perceptions about writing content and perceived constraints relating to student abilities, class size and curriculum overload, their primary approach was to lecture the teachers about the inappropriateness of these perceptions. Since participants were never presented with vivid, credible examples of successful implementation of this approach in similar settings and since they were not supported in trying these strategies in their own classrooms, the teachers' perceptions about the difficulty of implementing the process approach to writing remained intact. Thus, the content and structure of this workshop actually reinforced many of the participants' constraining perceptions rather than challenging these perceptions and giving the participants the tools they would need to adopt alternative perspectives.

The workshop leaders seemed to assume that most of the participants held similar perceptions about constraints to implementing new approaches to writing instruction. Rather than recognizing and using the supportive teachers who had initiated the workshop and who were eager to change writing practice at North as a resource, they dismissed them as "unusual" and focused on the negative teachers. The leaders' perception that this was a "backward" group and their subsequent low expectations caused them to lose potentially powerful allies in the change process.

The primary interaction between the teachers' perceptions and the

content and structure of this particular workshop was one of mutual reinforcement rather than challenge and change. The leaders' expectations were shaped by their interpretation of the participants' limitations and were in turn reinforced by the participants' responses to their teaching efforts. The participants' perceptions of constraints in the context and uncertainty in their ability to implement this approach to writing instruction were reinforced by the lack of credible examples and lack of support in attempting new practices. This negative cycle had a particularly strong effect on the success of this workshop.

The Interaction Between School Context and the Workshop

The leaders of this workshop appeared to have developed a number of preconceptions about the constraints and priorities in this particular context based on their prior experiences in the district and their interpretation of events that occurred during the workshop. Having taught in the district for many years themselves, the leaders had personally experienced many of the changes and conflicts characteristic of this large urban district. They shared examples of the challenges they faced in their own teaching situations relating to particularly demanding or needy students. They also expressed contempt for the central administration and suspicion of building level administrators and referred to numerous examples of the negative effect of district and building level policies on teacher behavior in Chicago in the past.

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They expressed the belief that elementary teachers had been affected most strongly by these policies and thus would have an even more difficult time understanding and accepting new approaches to writing instruction. These perceptions, influenced by their experiences in the district context, shaped the leaders' expectations and behavior in the workshop.

The leaders' perceptions about limitations in this context were reinforced by their interpretation of events that occurred during the workshop. Because they believed that the implementation of a new approach to writing depended in a large part on principal support, the fact that the principal at North rarely attended the workshop seemed to reinforce their low expectations for the success of this workshop. However, they never attempted to contact the principal or engage her as an ally. Before the workshop began, the principal had initiated another major change effort which involved redesigning the curriculum and rethinking teacher roles and responsibilities. Rather than seeing this as another opportunity to support teacher learning and change, the workshop leaders viewed this effort as an attempt to manipulate and control teachers which was preventing the workshop participants from innovating and taking risks. Because they were personally involved in the union-school board negotiations, they also assumed that the participants in the workshop were equally involved and distressed by how salary negotiations were progressing at that particular time.

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Interviews with the participants indicated, however, that the majority of them were not particularly concerned about these school and district events. The leaders appeared to have many perceptions about constraints and priorities in this context which they assumed all the participants shared and which shaped the way they conducted this workshop. Thus, the context both shaped and reinforced the perceived constraints of the leaders which in turn shaped the way they conducted the workshop.

Missing Links

The context, the workshop and teacher perceptions all seemed to interact in ways that inhibited change in writing instruction practice at North. The overcrowding, diverse student population and multiple curriculum requirements contributed to the teachers' perceptions of many constraints to implementing an individualized, time-consuming approach to writing instruction in their classrooms. Because the leaders perceived so many constraints in the context and had such low expectations for the teachers, they did little to support the teachers in breaking th. ugh their negative perceptions. The kinds of powerful links to classroom practice that are needed to change teachers' beliefs were missing from this workshop.

There were few links between the workshop and the school context as well. The leaders made no efforts to create relationships with the principal that might have allowed them to impact school policies to provide a more

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supportive context for changing writing instruction practice. The school leaders made little effort to use the workshop leaders' expertise and observations to help create a more supportive context for change. No links were made between this change effort and other change efforts going on in the school. The kinds of powerful links between innovation efforts and school context that are needed to support long-term change were missing in this situation as well.

Links between actual classroom practice and school policies and practices relating to curriculum and instruction were also weak. The organizational structures designed to support teacher participation and learning were often enacted in ways that contributed to teachers' perceptions of curriculum overload and fragmentation. Very few structures were in place to ensure that actions taken by the curriculum committees or teacher participation in classes and workshops were connected to actual classroom practice. The kinds of powerful links between school policies and classroom practice that are needed to support long-term change were also missing at North.

Implications for Practice

The school context into which this workshop was introduced made it a particularly challenging change endeavor. It is obvious that a school in which writing is a priority, goals are clear and non-conflicting, and classrooms are

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small would have been more supportive of change. However, North does represent the reality of many school settings. Goals and priorities are seldom clear, teachers' often perceive many constraints to change and curricula and classrooms are often overcrowded. Was this workshop doomed to failure because of the context? What could have been done to strengthen its effects in this setting?

It was evident that the workshop leaders, workshop designers, principal, and teacher participants all needed to approach this workshop in a much different manner in order to support long-term change in writing instruction practice at North. Lessons learned from this setting lend support to the emphasis in previous studies on the need to carefully plan both the content of teacher learning opportunities and ways to ensure that the particular context will support long-term implementation of new approaches to instruction. This study suggests a number of ways in which instructional change designers, workshop leaders, school leaders and teachers can work together to create the kinds of links needed to support teacher learning and change.

Designers of Instructional Change Projects

This study supports the claims made by Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1990), McLaughlin (1990) and others studying the implementation of innovations that change efforts need to be carefully integrated into school contexts in order

to support long-term change. This study pointed out the need for designers of change projects to include time in their workshop schedules for leaders to become familiar with the priorities and constraints in the context in which they are attempting to facilitate change. Procedures and structures for working with principals and school leaders to learn about the context and to plan how to connect this effort to other change efforts going on in the school need to be a part of workshop design. Taking the time to gather data and make links with the school context are integral parts of any teacher change effort.

The results of this study also suggest that workshop leaders need support in challenging their own perceptions about constraints in the schools in which they are working. Change effort designers need to have structures in place to help them monitor the progress of their efforts as they occur. They need to build in opportunities throughout the experience for participants to share concerns and suggestions. Support systems for workshop leaders that require them to collaboratively reflect on their workshop-leading practice with other workshop leaders in order to continually refine their own practice are also needed. Assisting workshop leaders in evaluating and reflecting on their own practice is an integral part of change effort design as well.

Workshop Leaders

The results of this study support a number of the suggestions made by staff development and innovation implementation theorists regarding

effective practice on the part of workshop leaders (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1990; Joyce & Showers, 1988; Schon, 1983; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990). The importance of understanding the context in which you are working was underscored in this setting. The need to systematically gather information about the perceptions of workshop participants regarding a particular innovation and their beliefs about constraints and priorities in the context is a particularly important part of workshop implementation. It is also important for workshop leaders to engage the principal and workshop participants in examining this data and working together to deal with constraints in the context effectively.

It was also evident that workshop leaders need to include activities that break through perceptions of constraints and misconceptions about the content or students. In this situation this might have been accomplished through providing vivid examples of how real teachers are effectively implementing the process approach to writing in their classrooms; demonstrating new strategies; guiding participants in planning and implementing these strategies in their classrooms; providing opportunities for participants to collaboratively reflect on their implementation attempts; and requiring participants to plan for long-term implementation. Teacher participants who are already implementing some of the desired strategies in their classrooms can be an excellent source of credible

implementation examples. Workshop leaders need to identify these teachers and actively engage them in the instruction process.

School Leaders

This study supports the claims made by Rosenholtz (1989), Berry and Ginsburg (1990) and others that the principal plays a particularly important role in establishing the kind of professional culture that supports teacher learning and change. The need for principals to become familiar with the goals of the change project being implemented in the school and their commitment to this change as a priority were particularly evident in this situation. Principals need examine the links between the different change efforts they are initiating and also need to assist teachers and workshop leaders in making these links as well.

It was evident in this context that principals also need to carefully examine what features of the school context might inhibit the success of a particular change effort. In this case, the principal needed to elicit teacher feedback on school policies that had an effect on classroom practice such as the addition of multiple school-wide contests to an already overwhelming curriculum. She also should have elicited feedback from the workshop leaders on their observations about obstacles to successful implementation of new approaches to writing instruction at North. Having outside experts come into your school setting provides an excellent opportunity for learning more

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about that setting. Principals need to use this opportunity to understand their schools more completely.

Principals also need to carefully evaluate the actual outcomes of teacher involvement in decision-making activities and the connection of organizational structures with actual classroom practice. Both support and accountability are needed to insure that instructional policies are actually enacted in classroom situations.

The Teachers

This study supports the claims made by Baird, (1992), Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1990), Richardson, (1990); Schon (1983) and others that teachers play a very important role in determining the success of any change effort. Teachers need to be committed to examining their practice and taking the time and energy needed to change that practice. Teachers should constantly seek evidence about the effectiveness of their current practice and reflect on ways in which they can improve their instruction. They should seek opportunities for collaborative reflection on their practice with their colleagues as well as opportunities to further develop their teaching skills.

It was also evident in this study that teachers need to make thoughtful choices about their involvement in professional development opportunities. Teachers need to set priorities and limit the number of workshops and classes they attempt to take at one time. In this situation, the participants needed to

make writing instruction a priority and commit the time needed to implement new strategies in order for this workshop to be effective.

Teachers also need to work with workshop leaders and the principal to identify constraints and priorities in the context and to determine ways to eliminate these constraints to effective practice. They need to be open to challenging their own perceptions of constraints and work toward changing the policies and practices that contribute to those constraints.

Implications for Further Study

These recommendations for practice raise some issues that require further study. While many studies suggest that change project designers, school leaders and teachers should collect accurate information about the constraints to change present in a particular school context, the current methods that are available for accomplishing this goal are often time-consuming and labor intensive. Further examination of effective ways for practitioners to collect information on perceived constraints and contextual features is necessary. What kinds of information are needed to gain an accurate picture of school contexts and teacher perceptions? Many of the measures which are available right now focus either on context or on perceptions about content and learning. How helpful are these measures in identifying perceptions and contextual features that affect teacher learning? Is there a way to combine these measures that is feasible for general use in

schools?

Studies which examine collaborative attempts among school leaders, workshop designers and teachers to identify perceived constraints and to design policies and learning opportunities that support teachers in overcoming constraints should be conducted in multiple school settings. The roles which the different participants play in this collaborative process should be examined. Specific areas of inquiry might include the following:

Effective workshop leadership. The directors of this particular project consider teacher leadership to be one of the strong points of their program. The results of this study raise some questions about the assumed benefits of teacher leadership. The fact that school context can have such a strong effect on the development of perceived constraints among teachers and that these perceived constraints can in turn strongly influence their teaching practice with their own peers as well as with their students indicates that peer leadership does have its pitfalls. This study raises a number of questions relating to workshop leadership that need to be addressed. Who can best help teachers identify constraints to change and overcome them? Does the problem of low leader expectations which was observed in this setting occur more often in teacher-led workshops? Is it easier for someone outside of a particular context to assist other teachers in seeing and breaking through their perceptions of constraints? What kind of support do teachers need to be

effective teachers of their colleagues? What kind of support do "outside experts" need to gain credibility in a school setting? Which kinds of leaders are better able to collaborate with teachers and principals to overcome constraints to change? All of these issues need to be examined in order to better prepare workshop leaders to structure effective learning opportunities.

Principal and teacher roles. The leaders of this workshop believed that principal participation in the workshop was necessary in order to break through the strong resistance to change which they believed these teachers were exhibiting. Considering more recent views of the principal as a transformational leader who works to empower her staff to be instructional leaders, this assumption raises many questions that demand further study. What role does a principal play in both identifying constraints to change in the school context and supporting teachers in overcoming constraints? In schools in which time is limited and classroom settings are particularly demanding, what kinds of leadership responsibilities are appropriate for teachers? What kind of support do teachers need to fulfill leadership roles? How can teacher involvement in instructional decision-making be structured most effectively? What role can workshop leaders play in stimulating teacher involvement in changing contextual features that constrain implementation of new approaches to instruction? Further examination of issues surrounding principal and teacher leadership is needed as well.

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A comparative study of a particular change effort as it occurs in different settings with different instructors would yield useful insights into these questions. Using surveys, interviews, classroom observation and participant observation, the researchers could identify perceptions about constraints in different contexts and could examine differences among the roles workshop leaders, teachers and principals play in overcoming constraints to change. This information could be used to inform change effort designers as they prepare future workshop leaders who would deliberately attempt to identify and work with principals and teachers to overcome constraints to change in school contexts. These leaders could then be involved in studies of their attempts to implement these new roles. Such studies would provide valuable information to practitioners and policy makers who are committed to designing effective teacher learning opportunities.

Closing

Teaching occurs in complex contexts that affect classroom practice in many ways. Teachers are constantly bombarded with multiple demands and conflicting needs. This study highlights the importance of identifying the constraints to change in a particular school context and the need for workshop leaders, principals and teachers to work together to overcome these

constraints. Further examination of the roles these different parties play in identifying and overcoming constraints needs to occur in a variety of settings to identify common themes across the different sites. Appropriate leadership roles for teachers and the effects of teacher leadership on workshop success are areas which require further study. Continual examination of such issues will assist practitioners and policy-makers in structuring learning opportunities that support long-term change in teacher practice. Only then can we achieve the goal of transforming education to better prepare our children for the future.

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